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ABSTRACT

Suburban middle class American situation comedies of the 1950s and 1960s idealized the postwar family ensemble with its unproblematic achievement of quality family life. The homemaker as portrayed in these sitcoms was positioned at the center of the postwar consumer economy by the consumer product industry, which built its economy on defining the social needs and self-identity of women as homemakers. Defined in terms of her homemaking function for the family and the economy, the homemaker was directly addressed by consumer product design and market research, and promised both leisure from household drudgery and an aesthetically pleasing home interior. Her identity as a shopper and homemaker was linked with class attributes in order to broaden the consumer economy base, and her deepest emotions and insecurities were tapped and transferred to consumer product design. Even as the women's movement in the late 1950s and 1960s was exposing ideologies and the contradictions imbedded in a social economy which positioned women as homemakers, long-running suburban family sitcoms defined women within the security of homelife. (49 end notes) (CGD)

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Paper Presented to the
1986 International Television Studies Conference

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Suburban Family Sitcoms and Consumer Product Design: Addressing the Social Subjectivity of Homemakers in the 1950s

The suburban middle-class family sitcom of the 1950s and 1960s centered on the family ensemble and its homelife -- breadwinner father, homemaker mother and growing children placed within the domestic space of the suburban home. Structured within definitions of gender and the value of homelife for family cohesion, these sitcoms drew upon particular historical conditions for their realist representation of family relations and domestic space. In the 1950s, a historically-specific social subjectivity of the middle-class homemaker was engaged by suburban housing, the consumer product industry, market research and the lifestyle represented in popular "growing family" sitcoms such as "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It To Beaver". With the reluctant and forced exit of women from positions in skilled labor after World War II and during a period of rapid growth and concentration of business, the middle-class homemaker provided these institutions with a rationale for establishing the value of domestic architecture, materialism and consumer products for quality of life and the stability of the family.

The middle-class homemaker was an important basis of this social economy -- so much so that it was necessary to define her in contradictions which held her in a limited social place. In her value to the economy, the homemaker was at once central and marginal.[1] She was

marginal in that she was positioned within the home, constituting the value of her labor outside of the means of production. Yet she was also central to the economy in that her function as homemaker was the subject of consumer product design and marketing, the basis of an industry. Thus, she was promised psychic and social satisfaction for being contained within the private space of the home; and as a condition of being targeted, measured and analyzed for the marketing and design of consumer products, she was promised leisure and freedom from housework.

These social and economic appeals to the American homemaker were addressed to the white middle-class whom Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen have described as "the landed consumer" for whom "suburban homes were standardized parodies of independence, of leisure, and, most important of all, of the property that made the first two possible".[2] The working class is marginalized in, and minorities are absent from, these discourses and the social economy of consumption. An ideal white and middle-class homelife was a primary means of reconstituting and resocializing the American family after World War II. By defining access to property and homeownership within the values of the growing family (breadwinner father, homemaker mother, children), women and minorities were guaranteed economic and social inequality through racial, ethnic, age and class segregation. While suburban housing provided the kind of gender-specific domestic space and restrictive living environment which was considered therapeutic for the post-war American family, consumer product design and market research directly addressed the class and gender of the homemaker.

The relationship of television programming to the social formation is important to understanding television as a social practice.

Graham Murdock and Peter Golding argue that media reproduce social relations under capital through "this persistent imagery of consumerism conceal(ing) and compensat(ing) for the persistence of radical inequalities in the distribution of wealth, work conditions and life chances." Stuart Hall has argued that the ideological effects of media fragment class into individuals, masking the determinacy of the economic, and replacing class and economic social relations with imaginary social relations.[3] The suburban family sitcom is dependent upon this displacement of economic determinations onto imaginary social relations which naturalize middle-class life.

Despite its adoption of historical conditions from the 1950s, the suburban family sitcom did not greatly proliferate until the late 1950s and early 1960s. While "Father Knows Best", in 1954, marks the "beginning" of popular discussion of the realism of this program format, it was not until 1957 that "Leave It to Beaver" joined it on the schedule. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the format multiplied while the women's movement was seeking to release homemakers from this social and economic gender definition.[4] This "nostalgic" lag between the historical specificity of the social formation and the popularity of the suburban family sitcom on the primetime schedule underscores its ability to mask social contradictions and to naturalize woman's place in the home.

The suburban family sitcom participated in the construction and distribution of social knowledge about the place of women. The following is an analysis of a historical conjuncture in which institutions important to social and economic policies defined women as homemakers: suburban housing, the consumer product industry and market research. "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver" mediated

this address to the homemaker through their representations of middle-class family life. They appropriated historically-specific gender traits and a realist mise-en-scene of the home to create a comfortable, warm and stable family environment. "Father Knows Best", in fact, was applauded for realigning family gender roles, for making "polite, carefully middle-class, family-type entertainment, possibly the most non-controversial show on the air waves."[5]

I. "looking through a rose-tinted picture window into your own living room"

After four years on radio, "Father Knows Best" began the first of its six seasons on network television in 1954. This program about the family life of Jim and Margaret Anderson and their children Betty (age 15), Bud (age 13) and Kathy (age 8) won the 1954 Sylvania Award for outstanding family entertainment. After one season the program was dropped by its sponsor for low ratings in audience polls. But more than 20,000 letters from viewers protesting the program's cancellation attracted a new sponsor (the Scott Paper Company) and "Father Knows Best" was promptly reinstated in the primetime schedule. It was a popular program even after first run production stopped in 1960 when its star, Robert Young, decided to move onto other roles. Reruns of "Father Knows Best" were on primetime for three more years.[6]

Contemporary writing on "Father Knows Best" cited as its appeal the way it rearranged the dynamics of family interaction in television situation comedies. Instead of the slapstick and gag-oriented family sitcom with a "henpecked simpleton" as family patriarch (presumably programs like "The Life of Riley"), "Father Knows Best" concentrated

instead on drawing humor from parents raising children to adulthood in suburban American. This prompted Saturday Evening Post to praise the Andersons for being "a family that has surprising similarities to real people":

> The parents ... manage to ride through almost any family situation without violent injury to their dignity, and the three Anderson children are presented as decently behaved children who will probably turn into useful citizens.[7]

These "real people" are the white American suburban middle-class family, a social and economic arrangement which was valued as the cornerstone of the American social economy of the 1950s. The verisimilitude associated with "Father Knows Best" extends not only from the traits and interactions of the middle-class family, but also from the placement of that family within the promises which suburban living and material goods held out for it. Even while the role of Jim Anderson was touted as probably "the first intelligent father permitted on radio or tv since they invented the thing",[8] the role of Margaret Anderson in relation to the father and the family -- as homemaker -- was equally important to post-World War II attainment of quality family life, social stability, and economic growth.

"Leave It to Beaver" was not discussed as much or in the same terms as "Father Knows Best". Its first run in primetime television was from 1957 to 1963, overlapping the last years of "Father Knows Best". Ward and June Cleaver raise two sons (Wally, 12 and Theodore -- the Beaver, 8) in a single-family suburban home which, in later seasons, adopted an identical floor plan to that of the Andersons. Striving for verisimilitude, the stories were based on the "real life" experiences of the scriptwriters in raising their own children. "In

recalling the mystifications that every adult experienced when he (sic) was a child, 'Leave It to Beaver' evokes a humorous and pleasurably nostalgic glow".[9]

Like "Father Knows Best", "Leave It To Beaver" was constructed around an appeal to the entire family as it naturalized middle-class family life. The Andersons and the Cleavers are already assimilated into the comfortable environment and middle-class lifestyle which housing and consumer products sought to guarantee for certain American families. While the Andersons and the Cleavers are rarely (if ever) seen in the process of purchasing consumer products, family interactions are closely tied to the suburban home. The Andersons' Springfield and the Cleavers' Mayfield are ambiguous in their metropolitan identity as suburbs in that the presence of a major city nearby is unclear, yet the communities exhibit the characteristic homogeneity, domestic architecture and separation of gender associated with suburban design.

Margaret Anderson and June Cleaver, in markedly different ways, are two representations of this contradictory function of the homemaker in that they are simultaneously contained and liberated by domestic space. By virtue of their placement as homemakers, they represent the promises of the economic and social processes which were dependent on establishing a limited social subjectivity for homemakers in the 1950s. Yet there are substantial differences in the character traits of the two women; and these revolve around the degree to which each woman is contained within the domestic space of the home. As we shall see, June's self-identity is more suppressed in the role of homemaker than is Margaret's with the result that June is peripheral in her participation in the family.

Yet these middle-class homemakers have a comfortable life in comparison to television's working class homemaker. In "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It To Beaver", the middle-class assimilation of these families is displayed through deep focus photography which exhibits the taste of middle-class furnishings and the arrangement of tidy rooms, appliances, and gender-specific functional space with private space for men in dens and workrooms and "family space" for women in kitchens. Margaret Anderson and June Cleaver have a lifestyle and domestic environment which is radically different from that of their working class sister, Alice Kramden in "The Honeymooners". The suburban home and consumer products have presumably liberated Margaret and June from the domestic drudgery which marks the daily existence of Alice.

The middle-class suburban environment is comfortable unlike the cramped and unpleasant space of the Kramden's New York City apartment. Part of the comedy of "The Honeymooners" working class and urban family is based on Ralph and Alice Kramden's continual struggle with their outmoded applicances, lower-class taste and economic blocks to acheiving the seemingly easy, natural and comfortable assimilation into the middle-class through homeownership and consumer goods. Ralph screams out of the apartment window to a neighbor to be quiet; the water pipe in the wall breaks spraying plaster and water all around; the Kramden's refrigerater and stove pre-date the post-war era.

One reason for this comedy of mise-en-scene is that urban sitcoms such as "I Love Lucy" and "The Honeymooners" focused on physical comedy and gags generated by their central comic figures (Lucille Ball and Jackie Gleason) and were filmed or shot live on limited sets before a studio audience.[10] "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It To

Beaver", on the other hand, shifted the source of comedy to the ensemble of the nuclear family as it realigned the roles within the family.

"Father Knows Best" was praised by Saturday Evening Post for its "outright defiance" of "one of the more persistent cliches of television script-writing about the typical American family ... the mother as the iron-fisted ruler of the nest, the father as a blustering chowderhead and the children as being one sassy crack removed from juvenile delinquency". Similarly, Cosmopolitan cited the program for overturning television programming's "message ... that the American father is a weak-willed, predicament-inclined clown (who is) saved from his doltishness by a beautiful and intelligent wife and his beautiful and intelligent children."[11]

Instead of building family comedy around slapstick, gags and clowning, the Andersons are the modern and model American suburban family, one whom -- judging from contemporary articles about "Father Knows Best" -- viewers recognized as themselves. Saturday Evening Post quoted letters from viewers who praised the program for being one the entire family could enjoy and "even learn something from it". In Cosmopolitan, Eugene Rodney, the producer of "Father Knows Best", identified the program's audience demographics as the middle-class and middle-income family. "It's people in that bracket who watch us. They don't have juvenile delinquent problems. They are interested in family relations, allowances, boy and girl problems".[12]

Even in 1959, during its sixth and last first run season, "Father Knows Best" was still written about as a program with strong ties to verisimilitude and a therapeutic value for the American family. Good Housekeeping reported that a viewer had written to the program to thank "Father Knows Best" for solving a family problem:

> Last Monday my daughter and I had been squabbling all day. By evening we were both so mad that I went upstairs to our portable TV set, leaving her to watch alone in the living room. When you got through with us, we both felt like fools. We didn't even need to kiss and make up. You had done it for us. Thank you all very much.

Good Housekeeping commented fondly on the program's "lifelike mixture of humor, harassment, and sentiment that literally hits home with some 15 million mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters. Watching it is like looking through a rose-tinted picture window into your own living room." In this last season, "Father Knows Best" ranked as the sixth most popular show on television.[13]

The verisimilitude of "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver" was substantially reinforced by the technical advantages of being based at major movie studios with sets which were standing replications of suburban homes on the lots of Columbia and Universal, respectively. Saturday Evening Post described the living environment of "Father Knows Best":

> The set for the Anderson home is a $40,000 combination of illusion and reality. Its two floors, patio, driveway and garage sprawl over Columbia Pictures Stage 10. One room with interchangeable, wallpapered walls, can be made to look like any of the four different bed-rooms. The kitchen is real, however. ... If the script calls for a meal or a snack, Rodney insists that actual food be used ... 'Don't give me too much food,' (Young said) 'Jim leaves quickly in this scene and we can't have fathers dashing off without cleaning their plates.'

The home is not a space for comedy riffs and physical gags but the

space for family cohesion, a guarantee that children can be raised in the image of their parents. In Redesigning the American Dream, Dolores Hayden describes suburban housing

> as an architecture of gender, since houses provide settings for women and girls to be effective social status achievers, desirable sex objects, and skillful domestic servants, and for men and boys to be executive breadwinners, successful home handy men, and adept car mechanics.[14]

II. "The home is an image ... of the household and of the household's relation to society"

As social historians Gwendolyn Wright and Dolores Hayden have shown, the development and design of suburban housing are fundamental cornerstones of social order. Hayden argues that "the house is an image ... of the household, and of the household's relation to society".[15] The single-family detached suburban home was architecture for the family, whose healthy life as a family would be guaranteed by a nonurban environment, neighborhood stability and separation of family functions by gender. The suburban middle-income family was the primary locus of this homogeneous social formation.

When President Harry Truman said at the 1948 White House Conference on Family Life that "children and dogs are as necessary to the welfare of this country as is Wall Street and the railroads", he spoke to the role of homeownership in transforming the post-war American economy. Government policies supported suburban development in a variety of ways. The 41,000 miles of limited access highways authorized by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 contributed to the development

of gender-specific space for the suburban family: commuter husbands and homemaker mothers. Housing starts became, and still continue to be, an important indicator of the well-being of the nation's economy. And equity in homeownership is considered to be a significant guarantee of economic security in the later years of life.[16]

But while the Housing Act of 1949 stated as its goal "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family", the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) was empowered with defining "neighborhood character" through segregation by class, race, ethnicity and income. And interior space, as well as neighborhood homogeneity, was designed with an eye toward gender-specific socializing functions for the family. Hayden argues that the two national priorities of the post-war period -- removing women from the paid labor force and building more housing -- were conflated and tied to

> an architecture of home and neighborhood that celebrates a mid-nineteenth century ideal of separate spheres for women and men . . . characterized by segregation by age, race, and class that could not be so easily advertised.[17]

In order to establish neighborhood stability, homogeneity, harmony and attractiveness, the FHA adopted several strategies. Zoning practices prevented multi-family dwellings and commercial uses of property. The FHA also chose not to support housing for minorities and non-nuclear families by adopting a policy called "red-lining" in which red lines were drawn on maps to identify the boundaries of changing or mixed neighborhoods. Since the value of housing in these neighborhoods was designated as low, loans to build and/or buy houses were considered to be bad risks. In turn, banks and savings and loans

refused to issue loans and mortgages for "red-lined" areas. In addition, the FHA published a "Planning Profitable Neighborhoods" technical bulletin which gave advice to developers on how to concentrate on homogeneous markets for housing. The effect was to "green-line" suburban areas promoting them by endorsing loans and development at the cost of creating urban ghettoes for minorities.[18]

Wright discusses how the FHA went so far as to enter into restrictive or protective covenants to prevent racial mixing and "declining property values". She quotes the 1947 manual:

> If a mixture of user groups is found to exist, it must be determined whether the mixture will render the neighborhood less desirable to present and prospective occupants. Protective covenants are essential to sound development of proposed residential areas, since they regulate the use of the land and provide a basis for the development of harmonious, attractive neighborhoods.

Despite the fact that the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the NAACP's case against restrictive covenants, the FHA accepted written and unwritten agreements in housing developments until 1968.[19]

The effect of these government policies was to create homogenous and socially stable communities with racial, ethnic and class barriers to entry. Suburban tracts excluded minorities and were designed to provide the benefits of homeownership to families defined as working husbands, women homemakers and growing children. Wright describes "a definite sociological pattern to the household that moved out to the suburbs in the late 1940s and 1950s": average age of 31 in 1950: few single, widowed, divorced and elderly; higher fertility rate than in the cities; 9% of suburban women worked compared with 27% in the

population as a whole. And Hayden lists the five groups which were excluded from single-family housing in the social policies of the late 1940s: single white women, white elderly working and lower-class, minority men of all classes, minority women of all classes, and minority elderly.[20]

The suburban dream house underscored this homogeneous definition of the suburban family. Domestic architecture was designed to display class attributes and reinforce gender-specific functions of domestic space as part of the process of raising children to be adults. Robert Woods Kennedy, an influential housing designer of the period, argued that the task of the housing architect is "to provide houses that helped his clients to indulge in status-conscious consumption ... to display the housewife 'as a sexual being' ... and to display the family's possessions 'as proper symbols of socio-economic class' claiming that (this) form of expression (was) essential to modern family life". In addition to value of the home for class and sexual identity, suburban housing was also therapeutic for the family. As Hayden observes, "whoever speaks of housing must also speak of home; the word means both the physical space and the nurturing that takes place there".[21]

A popular design for the first floor of the home was the "open floor-plan" which provided a whole living environment for the entire family. With few walls separating living, dining and kitchen areas, space was open for the family togetherness even if they were in separate rooms. This "activity area" would also allow children to be within sight and hearing of the mother. Father could have his own private space in a den and workroom and a detached garage for his car, while mother might be attracted to modern and model kitchens with

separate laundry room. Bedrooms were designated in areas called the "quiet zone", perhaps on the second floor at the head of a stairway, away from the main activities of the household. While children might have the private space of individual bedrooms, parents shared the "master bedroom" which was larger and sometimes equipped with walk-in closets and dressing areas.[22]

This housing design, built on a part of an acre of private property with a yard for children, allowed the post-war middle-class family to give their children a lifestyle which was not so commonly available during the depression and World War II. This domestic haven provided the setting for the socialization of girls into women and boys into men, a place which the breadwinner father paid for with his labor and which the homemaker maintained with hers. Having been placed in the home by suburban development and housing design, the homemaker's life in the home was the concern of the consumer product industry. The basis of its economy, the homemaker was promised leisure from household drudgery and an aesthetically pleasing interior environment.

III. "leisure <u>can</u> transform her life even if good design can't"

Like suburban housing, the consumer product industry demonstrated an organized desire to replace the heterogeneity of social life with a middle-class consumer culture. And just as housing design and suburban development were based on establishing the natural place for women in the home, the consumer product industry built its economy on defining the social needs and self-identity of women as homemakers. But this industrial definition of the homemaker underwent significant

changes during the 1950s as suburban housing proliferated to include the working class.

There were two significant shifts in the focus of discussions among designers about the role of product design in social life. The first was in 1955 when, instead of focusing on the practical problems of design, the Fifth Annual Design Conference at Aspen drew record attendance to discuss the theoretical and cultural aspects of design. Among the topics were the role of design in permitting leisure to be enjoyable and the possibility that mass communications could permit consumer testing of product design before the investment of major capital in the product. Design was no longer simply a matter of aesthetically pleasing shapes, but "part and parcel of the intricate pattern of twentieth-century life". The second shift in discussions among designers occurred in early 1958 when Industrial Design (a major design trade journal) published several lengthy articles on market research which it called "a new discipline -- sometimes helpful, sometimes threatening -- that is slated to affect the entire design process".[23]

Prior to the prominence of market research, designers discussed the contribution of product design to an aesthetically pleasing life-style, to the quality of life, and to making daily life easier. While the homemaker was central to the growth and organization of the consumer product industry, in December 1957 the editors of Industrial Design introduced the journal's fourth annual design review with an article which positions the homemaker as a problematic recepient of the benefits of design. Entitled "Materialism, Leisure and Design", this essay is worth quoting at some length.[24]

It first summarized the contribution of design to the leisure obtained from consumer products:

> We care very much about this world of things, partly because we are design-conscious and partly because we are American: this country is probably unique in that a review of the year's products is actually a measure of the material improvement in the everyday life of most citizens ... We think there is a good side (to American materialism), and that it does show up here -- in quality, in availability and in the implication of increased leisure. Traditionally American design aims unapologetically at making things easier for people, at freeing them.

The article went on to respond to cynics who questioned whether homemakers <u>should</u> be freed from housework. <u>Industrial Design</u> argued for the potentially beneficial emancipation of the homemaker gained by product design:

> Automatic ranges and one-step washer-dryers leave the housewife with a precious ingredient: time. This has come to be regarded as both her bonus and her right, but not everyone regards it with unqualified enthusiasm. Critics belonging to the woman's-place-is-in-the-sink school ask cynically what she is free <u>for</u>. The bridge table? Afternoon tv? The lonely togetherness of telephone gossip? The analyst's couch? Maybe. But is this the designer's problem? Certainly it is absurd to suggest that he has a moral responsibility <u>not</u> to help create leisure time because if he does it is likely to be badly used. More choice in how she

> spends her time gives the emancipated woman an opportunity to face problems of a larger order than ever before, and this can transform her life, even if good design can't. In any case, the designer does have a responsibility to fill leisure hours, and any hours, with objects that are esthetically pleasing.[25]

These attempts to equate design aesthetics with leisure for the homemaker were occasionally challenged because they marginalized life-styles other than the middle-class. When Dr. Wilson G. Scanlon, a psychiatrist, addressed the 1957 meeting of the Southern New England Chapter of the Industrial Designers Institute, he argued that the act of "excessive purchasing of commodities (was) a form of irrational and immature behavior", that new purchases and increased leisure have not put anxieties to rest and that "acceptance of some eccentricity rather than emphasis on class conformity should make for less insecurity (and) a nation that is emotionally mature".[26]

Esther Foley, home services editor of MacFadden Publications, "shocked and intrigued" her audience at the "What Can the Consumer Tell Us?" panel at the 1955 conference of the American Society of Industrial Designers by discussing working class homemakers. The flagship magazine of MacFadden Publications was True Story which had a circulation of 2,000,000 nearly every year from 1926 through 1963. In addition to the confessional stories in the company's True Romance, True Experience and other True titles, in the 1950s and 1960s some of MacFadden's publications were called "family behavior magazines", appealing to the working class homemakers who were "not reached by the middle-class service magazines such as McCalls and Ladies Home Journal".[27]

Foley introduced a "slice of life" into the theoretical discussions of design by showing color slides of the homes of her working class readers. She showed

> their purchased symbols -- the latest shiny "miracle" appliances in badly arranged kitchens, the inevitable chrome dinette set, the sentimental and unrelated living room furnishings tied together by expensive carpets and cheap cotton throw rugs.[28]

While Scanlon complained of the psychological damage to the nation from class conformity through consumerism (an issue the Women's Movement would soon raise), Foley illustrated the disparity between the working class and an aesthetics of product design articulated for the middle-class. These criticisms questioned the value of freeing the homemaker from domestic drudgery, the problem of a self-identity centered on consumerism and the narrowly middle-class identification of homemakers by the consumer product industry. Despite this recognition of the social and economic contradictions embedded in consumer products, the homemaker was a fundamental subject of the growing consumer economy.

In the mid-1950s, Industrial Design began to publish lengthy analyses of product planning divisions in consumer product corporations. The journal argued that changes in industrial organization would be crucial to the practice of design. There were three important issues for designers: (1) how large corporations could summon the resources necessary for anlayzing consumer needs and habits and thus drive smaller companies out of the increasingly competitive market for consumer products; (2) how product designers must become aware of the role of design in business organizations; and (3) how

industrial survival in the area of consumer goods would increasingly depend on defining new needs of the consumer.[29]

Among these company profiles was an article on the ten stages of toaster oven product planning by General Electric which linked "appearance design" with corporate and consumer needs: "what (design) will achieve maximum sales volume?". The close relationship between research and design is illustrated by GE's 1952 "advance industrial design group" test of a wall-mounted refrigerator. The first stages of design testing measured the "maximum reach-in for average housewife's height." The article was illustrated with a picture of a woman standing with arm outstretched into mockup of the refrigerator. While at first glance this is an amusing notion, the homogeneity of suburban development and housing design suggests that this physical identification of "the average housewife" is consistent with her placement within limited social definitions.[30]

This need for the consumer product industry to define the homemaker and, through her, its value to homelife is well illustrated by a 1957 discussion among television set designers on whether to design television sets as pieces of furniture or as functional instruments like appliances. The designers talked about three aspects of this problem: (1) how to define the role and function of television in many aspects of daily life, not solely as part of living room viewing; (2) how to discover the needs of the consumer in television set design; and (3) the necessity of recognizing the role of television set design as part of an industry with a mass market. Whether furniture or appliance, television set design should help the homemaker integrate the set into the aesthetics of interior decoration.[31]

The case for television as furniture was based on better "taste" on the part of consumers and the rapidly expanding furniture industry. Television set purchases exhibited a trend toward "good taste" and away from the "18th century mahogany and borax-modern cabinets". In the previous year (1956), the furniture industry had had its best year yet in terms of sales. Given the saturation of television which reached 87% by 1960, designers agreed that people were spending more time at home and were more interested in its appearance, replacing existing furniture which was wearing out. Television set designers needed to consider how television sets would play an important role in this redecoration of the home and how to help the homemaker make these decisions:

> There is not a homemaker who has not faced the problem of a proper room arrangement, lighting, color and decoration for television viewing -- and even hi-fi listening. Yet let's be honest: the industry has not made an effort to solve this problem.[32]

The case for television as an instrument rested on its portability. Recent developments in the technology of television allowed the design of smaller and more lightweight sets which could therefore be easily integrated into outdoor activities (on the deck behind the house) and into the kitchen (on the kitchen counter with a cabinet which would match the color of the appliances). For cues on how to proceed to fill this consumer need, television set designers suggested looking to the appliance industry which was already effective in integrating products into complete and efficient packages for the kitchen.[33]

The consumer product design industry was developing an increased awareness of the significance of the homemaker in the economics of marketing and design. Until market research, her "needs" as a homemaker were partially determined by simply asking her and then placing her responses within expert knowledge. The 1957 Design Symposium at Silvermine invited five homemakers to participate in the conference rather than merely be the topic of discussion. They were not "typical housewives but five women with the ability to give serious thought and attention to shopping". These women helped the designers to analyze the function in their lives of irons, washing machines, foreign cars, vacuum cleaners and ranges. But, "the feminine voice of the housewife was not the only voice heard at Silvermine". Four male "experts" discussed the need for consumers to communicate their "needs and wants" and how the federal highway program, which fostered suburban expansion, would also contribute to the development of a new mode of consumption: the shopping center. They also observed that deciding what product to buy produces tension which must be relieved.[34]

Hayden points out that housework is status-producing labor for the family at the same time that it lowers the status of the homemaker by separating her from public life. The "psychological conflict" engendered from "guarantee(ing) the family's social status at the expense of her own ... increases when women .. come up against levels of consumption" which lie outside of their abilities for upward mobility.[35] Market research based its strength on its ability to turn these tensions around, to place them in the service of the consumer economy.

IV. "women respond with favorable emotions to the fresh, cream surface of a newly opened shortening can"

By 1958, the "feminine voice" of the homemaker was even further enmeshed in expert opinion from the field of consumer science and psychology. With high competition in the consumer product industry, it was no longer adequate to determine the conscious needs of the homemaker through interviewing. Instead, market researchers sought to uncover the unconscious processes of consumption. Industrial Design described the market researcher as "a man with a slide rule in one hand and a copy of Sigmund Freud in the other." The market researcher codified the unconscious motivations in purchasing and quantified them.[36]

The class and gender related tensions inherent in decisions about which consumer product to buy could be identified through market research and alleviated through design. The status of the home and the identity of the homemaker, two important subjects of this research, were based on the development of suburban housing and its concomitant change in shopping patterns. With the impersonal supermarket replacing the small retailer, market researchers argued that "sales talk had to be built into product and packaging".[37] This sales talk included two related aspects of market research: defining consumers' awareness of their social identities and class attributes and designing products which would address social identities and class attributes. Survey research, depth or motivational research and experimental research sought to link design with class and gender characteristics and ultimately to determine how product design could appeal to upward mobility and confirm the self-identity of homemakers.

Survey research helped to correlate the "social image" of products with their users in order to design products which would attract new groups as well as retain current buyers. The Index of Social Position developed by August Hollingshead of Yale University organized data on consumers into an estimation of their social status in the community. A multi-factor system rated residential position (based on neighborhood), power position (based on occupation) and taste level (based on education). The total score, he argued, would reveal a family's actual place in the community replacing subjective judgements by interviewers. Survey research such as this tried to eliminate interviewer prejudice and render "objective" evaluations of class status.[38]

This rating system depends on the definition of the family offered by suburban living: breadwinner father, homemaker mother and growing children. Other types of market research focused on the function of women as homemakers, thus placing the economic responsibility for class status with the father and addressing the mother through emotional connotations associated with homemaking. Depth research looked into the psychic motivations of consumers but, as Industrial Design observed,

> interpretations of depth interviews seldom go into the ultimate psychoanalytic roots of the consumer's motivations -- like the now-famous discussion of baking a cake as a reenactment of the birth of a child.[39]

Depth-probing did reveal, however, that "women reacted with favorable emotions to (the) fresh, creamy surface of a newly opened shortening can". Ernest Dichter redesigned the Snowdrift shortening label with this emotional response in mind. A swirl of shortening

constitutes the letter "S" emerging from the can on a wooden spoon which furthered the associations with traditional cooking. The s-shape integrated the name of the product with the emotional appeal of the texture of the shortening. Proof of these researcher deductions and, presumably, the typicality of homemaker emotions, was provided by IBM data processing equipment which could handle large samples and quantify the results.[40]

Experimental research included projective techniques which would elicit unconscious responses to market situations on the theory that consumers would unconsciously impute to others their own feelings and motivations. These included word-association, cartoons in which the word balloons would be filled in, narrative projection in which a story would be finished, role-playing and group discussions. For example, women were shown the following two grocery lists and asked to describe the woman who used each list.

Shopping List I

pound and a half of hamburger
2 loaves of Wonder Bread
bunch of carrots
1 can Rumford's Baking Powder
Nescafe instant coffee
2 cans Del Monte peaches
5 lbs. potatoes

Shopping List II

pound and a half of hamburger
2 loaves of Wonder Bread
bunch of carrots
1 can Rumford's Baking Powder
1 lb. Maxwell House Coffee (Drip Ground)
2 cans Del Monte peaches
5 lbs. potatoes

If you guessed that that housewife who made out Shopping List I was lazy, you are right. 48% described her as lazy but only 4% felt the woman who made out Shopping List II was lazy. Women who consider

instant coffee a trait of the lazy housewife are less likely to buy instant coffee, "indicating that personality image was a motive in buying choice".[41]

Perception tests hooked homemakers up to machines which measured the speed with which a package could be identified and how much of the "message" of the design could be retained. Role-playing at shopping and group discussions in the Institute for Motivational Research's "Motivational Theater" were "akin to ... 'psychodrama'" in that consumers would reveal product, class and gender related emotions which the researchers would elicit and study. These techniques "stimulate expression" by "putting oneself in another's position -- or in one's own position under certain circumstances, like shopping or homemaking".[42]

Some designers complained that this application of science to design inhibited the creative process of design,by substituting testable and quantifiable elements for aesthetics. But the fact remained that market research techniques were winning out over more traditional designers. In an address to the 1958 Aspen Conference, sociologist C. Wright Mills charged designers with "bringing art, science and learning into a subordinate relation with the dominant institutions of the capitalist economy and the nationalist state". Mill's paper was considered to be "so pertinent to design problems today" that Industrial Design ran it in its entirety rather than publishing a synopsis of its major points as it typically did with conference reports.[43]

Mills complained that design helped to blur the distinction between "human consciousness and material existence" by providing stereotypes of meaning. He argued that consumer products had become "the Fetish of human life" in the "virtual dominance of consumer

culture". Mills charged designers with promulgating "The Big Lie" of advertising and design, that is, "we only give them what they want". He accused designers and advertisers of determining consumer wants and tastes which was characteristic "of the current phase of capitalism in America ... creat(ing) a panic for status, and hence of panic of self-evaluation, and ... connect(ing) its relief with the consumption of specified commodities". While Mills did not specifically address the role of television, he did cite the importance of distribution in the post-war economy and "the need for the creation and maintenance of the national market and its monopolistic closure".[44]

V. Television suburban homelife in Springfield and Mayfield

One way that television distributed knowledge about a social economy based on positioning women as homemakers was through the suburban family sitcom. The signifying systems of these sitcoms invested in the social subjectivity of homemakers put forth by suburban development and the consumer product industry. In their representation of middle-class family life, "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver" mobilized the discourses of other social institutions to present the home as a haven for the family and the homemaker as contented with and unharried by the terms of her existence. Realistic mise-en-scene and the character traits of family members naturalized middle-class homelife and masked its social and economic barriers to entry.

The heterogeneity of class and gender which market research analyzed is not manifested in either "Father Knows Best" or "Leave It to Beaver". The Andersons and the Cleavers would probably rank quite

well in the Index of Social Position. Their neighborhoods have large and well-maintained homes; both families belong to their respective country clubs. Jim Anderson is a well-respected insurance agent with his own agency (an occupation chosen because it would not tie him to an office).[45] Ward's work is ambigous but both men carry briefcases and wear suit and tie to work. They have the income which easily provides their families with roomy, comfortable and pleasing surroundings, attractive clothing, and homemakers who need not work outside the home. Both men are college-educated and the programs often discuss the children's future college education.

"Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver" rarely make direct reference to the social and economic means by which the families attained and maintain their middle-class status. Their difference from other classes is not a subject of these sitcoms. By masking the separation of race, class, age and gender by which suburban neighborhoods were planned, "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver" naturalize the privilege of the middle-class. Yet there was one episode of "Leave It to Beaver" from the early 1960s which laid bare its assumptions about what constitutes a good neighborhood. In doing so, the episode suggests how narrowly the heterogeneity of social life can be defined.

Wally and Beaver visited Wally's smart-aleck friend, Eddie Haskell, who had moved out of his family's home into a rooming house in what Beaver recognizes as a "crummy neighborhood". Unlike the design of suburban developments, this neighborhood had large, older, rambling two-story (or more) houses set close together (possibly once single family dwellings, now rental units). Porches were large, the door to one house was left ajar, paper debris was blown about by the wind and

was left on yards and a front porch. Two men were working on an obviously older model car in the street, hood and trunk open, tire resting against the car (no garage); two garbage cans are on the sidewalks (unattractive, no alleys for concealment); an older man in sweater and hat walked along carrying a bag of groceries (no car). On a front lawn, a rake leaned against a bushel basket with leaves piled up (sloppy home appearance); a large two-person canvas covered lawn swing sat on a front lawn (no backyard); one house had a sign in the yard: "for sale by owner -- to be moved" (no real estate agent?)

Wally and Beaver were uneasy in this neighborhood, one which is obviously in transition and in which activities (working on cars, maintaining lawns, having garbage picked up) are available for public view. But everyone visible is white. This is a rare example of these sitcoms directly defining good and bad neighborhoods. What is more typical is the assumption that the homes of the Andersons and the Cleavers are representative of their neighborhoods.

In different ways, the credit sequences which begin these programs suggest recurring aspects of suburban living. The opening of "Father Knows Best" begins with a long shot of the Anderson's two-story home, a fence separating the front lawn from the sidewalk, its landscape including trellises with vines and flowers. A cut to the interior entryway shows the family gathering together. In earlier seasons, Jim, wearing a suit and hat in hand, prepares to leave for work. He looks at his watch and the grandfather clock to the left of the door shows the time as nearly 8:30. Margaret, wearing a blouse, sweater and skirt, brings Jim his briefcase and kisses him good-bye. The three Anderson children giggle all in a row on the stairway leading up to the second-floor bedrooms. In later seasons, after the long

shot of the house, the Anderson family gathers in the entryway to greet Jim as he returns from work. Margaret, wearing a dress too fancy for housework, kisses him at the doorway as their children join them uniting the family in the home.

The opening credits of "Leave It to Beaver", on the other hand, gradually evolved from an emphasis on the youngest child to placing him within the neighborhood and then the family. The earliest episodes opened with child-like etchings drawn in a wet concrete sidewalk. Middle seasons featured Beaver walking home along a street with single-family homes set back by manicured and landscaped lawns without fences. In later seasons the Cleaver family leaves their two-story home for a picnic trip: Ward carries the thermal cooler, June (in a dress, even for a picnic) carries the basket and Wally and Beaver join their parents in their late model car.

In "Father Knows Best" the family circulates around the breadwinner father (star Robert Young) who, variously, leaves or returns home. The credit sequence of "Leave It to Beaver" establishes Barbara Billingsley (June Cleaver) first in the cast line up but acknowledges "Jerry Mathers as the Beaver" as star as well as the source of family situation comedy. "Leave It to Beaver" de-centers the family around the youngest child whose raising to adulthood provides problems which the older child has already surmounted (or never had) while "Father Knows Best" coheres around the family ensemble.

The narrative space of these programs is dominated by the domestic space of the home. "Father Knows Best" leaves the home environment much less often than "Leave It to Beaver" which is centered on the youngest child who is often seen at school. This placing of the family within the domestic space of the home is, in large measure, the

basis of the ability of these programs to "seem real". With their nearly identical interior design, the Andersons' home in Springfield and the Cleavers' home in Mayfield appropriate the gender-specific space which would ensure healthy family life. During the first seasons of "Leave It To Beaver", the design of the Cleaver's home resembled an older home design more than a suburban dream house. The kitchen was large and homey with glass and wood cabinets. The rooms were separated by walls and closed doors unlike the more open floor plan and modern all wood kitchen cabinets which the home would adopt in later seasons.

By the 1960s, the Cleavers were living in the "open floor plan" of the Andersons, a popular housing design of the 1950s. As you enter the homes, to your far left is the den, the private space of the father. To the right of the den is the stairway leading to the "quiet zone" of the bedrooms. To your right is the living room, visible through a wide and open entryway the size of two doors. A similar wide and open doorway integrates the living room with the formal dining room. A swinging door separates the dining room from the kitchen. The deep focus cinematography typical of these sitcoms displays the expanse of living space in this "activity area".

While the Cleaver children share a bedroom, it comes equipped with a private bathroom and a portable television set. Ward and June's bedroom is small with twin beds. It is rarely seen, not being a site of narrative activity which typically takes place in the boys' room or on the main floor of the home. These two small bedrooms belie the scale of the house when it is seen in long shot, unlike the Anderson home which makes more use of the potential of the bedrooms for narrative space, especially the "master" bedroom.

With its four bedrooms, the Anderson home allows each of the children the luxury of his or her own bedroom. Jim and Margaret's "master" bedroom is larger than those of their children, has twin beds separated by a night stand and lamp, a walk-in closet, a dressing table, arm chairs and a small alcove. The "master" bedroom was to be private space for parents away from children, but the Anderson children have easy access to their parents' bedroom. The Andersons, however, have only one bathroom. Betty has commented that when she gets married she will have three bathrooms because "there won't always be two of us".

The Andersons and the Cleavers also share similarities in the decor of their homes, displaying possessions in a comfortably unostentatious way. Immediately to the left of the Anderson's front door is a large, free standing grandfather clock; to the right and directly across are bookcases built into the wall and filled with hardbacks. In earlier episodes of "Leave It to Beaver" the books (also hardbacks) were on built-in shelves in the living room. Later, these books were appropriated by Ward's study, lining the many built-in bookshelves behind his desk.

The two families share similar taste in wall decorations and furnishings. Among the landscapes in large and heavy wood frames on the Cleavers' walls are pictures of sailing vessels and reproductions of "great art" such as Gainsborough's "Pinky". While the Andersons do not completely share the Cleavers' penchant for candelabra on the walls and on tables, their walls are tastefully decorated with smaller landscapes. Curiously, neither house engages in the prominent display of family photographs.

The large living room in each home has a fireplace. There is plenty of room to walk around furniture which is of a decidedly "non-modernistic" design, over-stuffed and comfortable or hard wood. The formal dining room in both homes includes a large wooden table and chairs which can seat six comfortably. It is here that the families have their evening meal. A sideboard or hutch displays dishes, soup tureens, and the like. The kitchen has its own, smaller and more utilitarian, set of table and chairs where breakfast is eaten. Small appliances such as a toaster, mixer, and coffee pot sit out on counters. A wall-mounted rack of paper towels is close to the sink. The Andersons' outdoor brick patio has a built-in brick oven, singed from use.

While both homes establish gender-specific areas for women and men, "Father Knows Best" is less repressive in its association of this space with roles within the family. Both Jim Anderson and Ward Cleaver have studies, private areas for the men. Ward is often doing ambiguous paperwork in his den, the rows of hardbacks behind his desk suggesting his association with knowledge and mental work. June's forrays into Ward's den tend to be brief, usually in search of his advice on how to handle the boys. Sometimes, as Ward works on papers, June sits in a corner chair sewing a button on Beaver's shirt. Ward's den is often the site of father-to-son talks. Its doorway is wide and open, revealing the cabinet-model television set which Beaver occasionally watches. While Jim has a similar den, it is much less often the site of narrative action and its door is usually closed.

Workrooms and detached garages are also arenas for male activity: lawn care equipment which the men of the families use; storage for paint, a place to work on the car or smaller engines. The suburban

homemaker does not have an equivalent private space. The family space of the kitchen, living room and dining room is the woman's space. In typical episodes of "Leave It To Beaver", June has encounters with her family in the kitchen while Ward's take place in more of the space of the house. As her sons come home through the kitchen door, June is putting up paper towels, tossing a salad, unpacking groceries or making meals. Margaret, having an older daughter, is often able to turn this family/woman space over to her. She is also more often placed within other space of the home: the patio, the attic, the living room.

Both Margaret and June easily adapt to Robert Woods Kennedy's concern that housing design display the housewife as a sexual being, but this is accomplished not so much through domestic space as through costumes. June's ubiquitous pearls, stocking and heels, and cinch-waisted dresses are amusing in their distinct contradiction with the realities of housework. While Margaret also wears dresses, or skirts, she tends to be costumed in a more casual manner and sometimes wears a smock when engaged in housework such as putting up curtains. Margaret is also occasionally seen in relatively sloppy clothes suitable for dirty work but marked as inappropriate to her status as a sexual being.

In one episode of "Father Knows Best", Margaret was dressed in dungarees, sweatshirt, and loafers, her hair covered by a scarf as she scrubs paint from her youngest daughter, Kathy. When Betty witnessed this sight, she laughed, "If you aren't a glamourous picture!" As Jim arrived home early, Betty counseled Margaret, "You can't let father see you like this!". Betty took over scrubbing and dressing Kathy while Margaret hurried off to change before Jim saw her. But Margaret

was caught, embarassed at not being dressed as a suburban object of desire. Jim good-natured echoed Betty's comment: "If you aren't a glamourous picture!" He calmed Margaret's minor distress at being seen by her husband in this departure from her usual toilette: "You know you always look great to me."

As this example shows, the agreement among Jim, Margaret and Betty on the proper attire for the suburban homemaker indicates the success with which Betty has been socialized within the family. Yet even though both programs were created around "realistic" storylines of children growing up within the family, the nurturing function of the home and the gender-specific roles of father and mother are handled very differently in "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It To Beaver".

By 1960, Betty, whom Jim calls "Princess", had been counseled through adolescent dating rituals but was shown to have "good sense" and maturity in her relations with boys. Well-kempt and well-dressed like her mother, Betty could easily substitute for Margaret in household tasks such as meal preparation and handling the younger children. In one episode, Jim and Margaret decided that their lives revolved too much around their children ("trapped", "like servants") and tried to spend a weekend away from the family leaving Betty in charge. While Betty handled the situation smoothly, Jim and Margaret were happier to continue their weekend at Cedar Lodge with all the children along.

Bud, the son, participates in the excitement of discovery and self-definition outside of personal appearance. A normal boy in the process of becoming a man, he gets dirty at sports and tinkering with engines, replaces blown fuses and handles lawn care. Unlike Betty, Bud had to be convinced that he can handle dating rituals even though

Jim counseled him that this awkward stage is normal and one which Jim himself went through.

Kathy's pet name is "Kitten" and, in distinct difference from her sister, adopted a tomboy persona and interest in sports. By 1959, Good Housekeeping purred that

> Kathy seems to have got the idea it might be more fun to appeal to a boy than to be one. At the rate she's going, it won't be long before (Jim and Margaret) are playing grandparents.[46]

Good Housekeeping was pleased that the Andersons were raising their children for yet another generation of families.

Danny Peary was also pleased with Kathy's development but for a very different reason: in the 1977 "Father Knows Best Reunion" show, Kathy was an unmarried gym teacher. Peary also felt that "Father Knows Best" was different from other suburban family sitcoms in its representation of women. "The three Anderson females ... were intelligent, proud, and resourceful. Margaret was Jim's equal, loved and respected for her wisdom".[47] The traits which characterize Margaret in her equality are her patience, good humor, and easy confidence in her family. Unlike Ward Cleaver, Jim is not so immune from wifely banter.

In one episode, Jim overheard Betty and her friend, Armand, rehearsing a play and assumed they were going to elope. Margaret had more faith in their daughter and good-naturedly tried to disuade Jim from his anxiety: "Jim, when are you going to stop acting like a comic strip father?" In the same episode, Jim and Margaret played Scrabble, an activity which the episode suggests they do together often. "Dad's getting beat at Scrabble again" observed Bud. Kathy

noticed, "He's stuck with the 'z' again". Margaret looked up Jim's z-word in the dictionary, doubting its existence. Margaret is able to continually best Jim at this work game and Jim is willing to continue to play despite certain defeat. During this game, Betty returned home from her date with Armand, saying their goodnight on the front porch. Jim was concerned because the porch light had burned out, thus creating a potentially seductive atmosphere for their parting. Margaret, not the least worried about Betty, remarked that she had been asking Jim to replace the bulb for a month.

In contrast to this easy-going family with character traits which allow for many types of familial interaction, "Leave It to Beaver" tells another story about gender relations in the home. June does not share Margaret's status in intelligence. In a discussion of their sons' academic performances, June remarked: "We can't all be A students, maybe the boys are like me". Ward responded: "No, they are-not like you" and then caught himself up short. Nor does June share Margaret's witty and confident relationship with her husband. She typically defers to Ward's greater sense about raising their two sons. Wondering how to approach instances of boy-ish behavior, June positions herself firmly at a loss. She frequently asks, mystified, "Ward, did boys do this when you were their age?" And Ward always reassures June that whatever their sons are doing (brothers fighting, for example) is a normal stage of development of boys, imparting to her his superior social and familial knowledge.

June's sons pass through her space in the kitchen, relaying pieces of information about school and friends as she engages in domestic activities. The episodes usually center on the private space of the boys' room where Ward often dispenses advice. Like her sons,

June acknowledges the need for his guidance. Unlike Margaret, June is structured on the periphery of narrative, secondary to Ward in the socialization of their sons and in the passive space of the home.

Often misogynist, Ward encourages the boys to adopt this attitude toward their mother and to women in general. In an early episode, Ward was replacing the plug on the toaster. He explained to Beaver that "your mother" always pulls it out by the cord instead of properly grabbing it by the plug. Beaver was impressed with Ward's knowledge of "'lectricity" to which Ward responded by positioning his knowledge as a condition of June's ineptness. "I know enough to stay about one jump ahead of your mother". Unlike "Father Knows Best", "Leave It to Beaver" works hard to contain June's potential threat to patriarchy. When June asked why Beaver would appear to be unusally shy about meeting a girl, Ward wondered as well: "He doesn't know enough about life to be afraid of women."

In the episode when Eddie Haskell moved out of the home, Ward agreed to support the Haskell's and forbid their sons to visit Eddie's bachelor digs. As Ward telephoned another father to ask him to do the same, June timidly asked (covering a bowl to put in the refrigerator), "Ward, aren't you getting terribly involved?" Ward answered that if this were their son who had moved out he would appreciate the support of other parents. June murmured assent as Ward and June continue the process of defining the limits of June's function within the family. Her role in socializing her sons in gender-specificity is passive deference.

While "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver" position the role of the homemaker in family life quite differently, both women effortlessly maintain the domestic space of the family environment.

In their representation of women's work in the home, "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver" show the great ease and lack of drudgery with which Margaret and June keep their homes neat, tidy and spotlessly clean. In any episode, these homemakers can be seen in the daily process of doing housework. June prepares meals, waters plants and dusts on a Saturday morning. She brings in groceries, wipes around the kitchen sink and asks Wally to help her put away the vacuum cleaner (which she has not been shown using). Margaret prepares meals, does dishes, irons, and also waters plants. While June is often stationary in the kitchen or sewing on buttons in the living room, Margaret is usually moving from one room to another, in the process of invisible and on-going domestic activity.

While one could easily argue that this lack of acknowledgement of the labor of homemaking shreds the fabric of verisimilitude of these sitcoms, leisure from housework was promised to homemakers by the consumer product industry. The deep focus cinematography which reveals the open floor plan of suburban housing design with its tasteful and middle-class furnishings also reveals the appliances in their kitchens. This realism of mise-en-scene integrates consumer products into the domestic space of their homes suggesting the means by which housework can be facilitated. Margaret and June are unharried homemakers, easily maintaining the comfortable environment necessary for quality family life.

In exchange for being the economic basis of the growing consumer product industry in the 1950s, the homemaker had the potential for receiving the leisure and environment which the acquisition of consumer products assured. Margaret and June mediate these benefits very easily. They are definitely not women of leisure but women for whom

housework is neither especially confining nor exclusively time-consuming. While Margaret and June engage in on-going domestic work, they are also unpressured by housework.

While Margaret is more busy about the house than June is, the visible result of their partially visible labor is the constantly immaculate appearance of their homes and variously well-kempt family members. (The older children are more orderly because they are further along in the process of socialization than the younger). Because characters are more fully drawn in "Father Knows Best" than in "Leave It to Beaver", Margaret engages in more leisure time than June does. She frequently reads in the evenings, plays Scrabble and goes out with Jim and/or the family. "Leave It to Beaver" is more determined to contain June within domestic parameters, thus positioning her character more closely within the framework of domestic servitude. Yet she also leaves the home for occasional entertainment with Ward and has time to quietly read, but to a lesser extent than Margaret.

Margaret and June are contented as homemakers. The "real time" to do piles of laundry or the daily preparation of balanced meals is a structured absence of the programs. The free time which appliances provide them is exhibited in their continual good humor and the quality of their interactions with the family. Unrushed and unpressured, Margaret and June are not so free from housework that they become idle and self-indulgent. They are well-positioned within the constraints of domestic activity and the promises of the consumer product industry.

Conclusion

We have seen how the homemaker was positioned at the center of the post-war consumer economy by institutions which were dependent on defining her social subjectivity as a homemaker. In the interests of family stability, suburban development and domestic architecture were designed with a particular definition of family economy in mind: a working father who could, alone, provide for the social and economic security of his family; a homemaker wife and mother who would maintain the family's environment; children who would grow up in neighborhoods undisturbed by heterogeneity of class, race, ethnicity and age.

The limited address to the homemaker by the consumer product industry and market research is easily understood when taken within this context of homogeneity in the social organization of the suburban family. Defined in terms of her homemaking function for the family and for the economy, her life could only be made easier by appliances. To ensure the display of her family's social status, experts assuaged any uncertaintities she may have had about interior decor by designing with these problems in mind. Linking her identity as a shopper and homemaker with class attributes in order to broaden the base of the consumer economy, her deepest emotions and insecurities were tapped and transferred to consumer product design.

In their representation of suburban family life, "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver" mask these social and economic determinations of the subjectivity of the homemaker and the social and economic inequalities which they assume. The verisimilitude of mise-en-scene, harmonious family life and easy contentment of Margaret Anderson and June Cleaver with their identities as homemakers conceal

these processes of subjectivity. The suburban family sitcom illustrated what the working-class family sitcom could not: the easy and unproblematic achievement of quality family life promised by the state and the post-war economy.

Murdock and Golding argue that media studies "should derive from, and feed into, the continuing debate on the nature and persistence of class stratification."[48] I have tried to approach this problem by considering the historical definitions of consumers offered by social institutions which, like television, have a stake in addressing certain class and gender identities. Yet this analysis of the place of television in the social economy cannot be accomplished without attention to resistances to institutional imperatives.

Even as the women's movement in the late 1950s and 1960s was exposing these ideologies and the contradictions imbedded in a social economy which positioned women as homemakers, long-running suburban family sitcoms defined women within the security of homelife: "Father Knows Best" (1954-1963), "Leave It to Beaver" (1957-1963), "The Donna Reed Show" (1958-1966), "The Dick Van Dyke Show" (1961-1966), "Hazel" (1961-1966), "Dennis the Menace" (1959-1963), and "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet" (1952-1966).[49] This relationship between social institutions and oppositional positions needs to be explored.

NOTES

[1] In "Women: The Longest Revolution", Juliet Mitchell argues that women's condition is bound up in this contradiction: "(Women) are fundamental to the human condition, yet in their economic, social and political roles, they are marginal. It is precisely this combination -- fundamental and marginal at one and the same time -- that has been fatal to them." Juliet Mitchell, Women: The Longest Revolution, (London: Virago, 1984), 18.

[2] Stewart and Elizabeth Ewen, Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 235.

[3] Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, "Capitalism, Communication and Class Relations", Mass Communication and Society, J. Curran, M. Gurevitch and J. Woollacott, eds. (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), 12 and 36; Stuart Hall, "Culture, Media and the 'Ideological Effect'", Mass Communication and Society, 336-339.

[4] I began this study by considering sitcoms which enjoyed three or more seasons on on prime time network television during the 1950s. While the suburban family sitcom comprised the majority of these 35 sitcoms, as might be expected, the period demonstrates a heterogeneity in its approach to sitcom television entertainment. The following is a breakdown of those sitcoms which ran for three or more seasons on prime time television: 1 - rural sitcom ("The Real McCoys"); 1 - black maid to a middle-class family ("Beulah"); 1 - social director on a cruise ship ("The Gale Storm Show"); 1 - city government ("The People's Choice"); 1 - slapstick ("I Love Lucy"); 1 - urban family ("Make Room for Daddy"); 2 - working class family ("The Life of Riley" and "The Honeymooners"); 2 - self-reflexive ("The Burns and Allen Show" and "Dobie Gillis"); 2 - service sitcoms ("Bilko" and "Hennesey"); 2 - older adults ("December Bride" and "Ethel and Albert"); 2 - ethnic family ("The Goldbergs" and "Mama"); 2 - single teachers ("Our Miss Brooks" and "Mr. Peepers"); 5 - single women in New York City, usually working women ("My Little Margie", "Private Secretary", "Jeannie", "Meet Millie" and "The Ann Sothern Show"); 12 - suburban families.

Of the 12 suburban family sitcoms, four do not directly address the issues of the growing family in a suburban lifestyle: "The Bob Cummings Show" (playboy photographer who lives with his sister and nephew in a suburban home); "I Married Joan" (zany housewife); "My Favorite Husband" (social status in the suburbs but no family); and "Bachelor Father" (exhibits much of the materialism associated with the period but the storylines do not address the development of the family as a wholesome unit). The remaining eight sitcoms all position middle-class families in non-urban single family dwellings: "The Ruggles" (1949-1952), "The Aldrich Family" (1949-1953), "The Stu Erwin Show" (1950-1955), "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet" (1952-1966), "Father Knows Best" (1954-1963), "Leave It To Beaver" (1957-1963), "The Donna Reed Show" (1958-1966) and "Dennis the Menace" (1959-1963).

This information was obtained from the following sources: Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows 1946-Present (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981); Les Brown, The New York times Encyclopedia of Television (New York: Times books, 1977); Henry Castleman and Walter J. Podrazik, The TV Schedule Book (new York: McGraw-Hill, 1984).

5 Kenneth Rhodes, "Father of Two Families", Cosmopolitan (April 1956), 125.

6 Rhodes, 125; Bob Eddy, "Private Life of a Perfect Papa", Saturday Evening Post (27 April 1957), 29; Brooks and Marsh, 245-6.

7 Rhodes, 125; Eddy, 29.

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9 "TV's Eager Beaver", Look (27 May 1958), 68.

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12 Eddy, 29; Rhodes, 127.

13 "Jane Wyatt's Triple Threat", Good Housekeeping (October 1959), 48.

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35 Hayden, 50.

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38 Fleishman, 35.

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47 Danny Peary, "Remembering 'Father Knows Best'", TV Book, Judy Fireman, ed. (New York: Workman Publishing Company, 1977), 173-5.

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